1608/4479

GOD, and all other REASONABLE BEINGS, *Happy in Proportion to their* Virtue.

OR, AN

ESSAY

UPON

MORAL VIRTUE,

And its neceſſary Connection with all

RATIONAL HAPPINESS.

IN A

LETTER

TO THE

Reverend Dr. *CLARK*,

Rector of St. *James's Weſtminſter*.

By a *CLERGY-MAN*. Mr Wonier

Τῆς περὶ τοὺς θεοὺς εὐσεβείας ἴσθι ὅτι τὸ κυριώτατον ἐκεινό ἐστιν, ὀρθὰς ὑπολήψεις περὶ αὐτῶν ἔχειν ὡς ὄντων καὶ διοικούντων τὰ ὅλα καλῶς καὶ δικαίως. Epictetus.

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1608/4779.

A

LETTER

TO THE

Rev^d Dr. *CLARK*, *&c.*

SIR,

THO' I have not the honour of a perſonal acquaintance with you, yet, if I may be allow'd to judge from the character which you have ſo juſtly eſtabliſh'd in the learned world, I need not fear your diſpleaſure for addreſſing to you my

 thoughts

thoughts upon Moral Virtue, and the neceſſity there is, that all the actions of the Divine Being ſhould be agreeable to the ſtricteſt rules of decency, juſtice and goodneſs, and to the immutable nature of things, in order to ſecure to himſelf that vaſt and all perfect happineſs which he is poſſeſs'd of.

The principle, upon which my reaſonings in the preſent Eſſay are built, has been repreſented by you in ſuch a ſtrong and beautiful light, that every thing advanc'd upon it is juſtly your due.

Your known candour, learning and piety, has given me encouragement to addreſs my ſelf to you, as to a patron who is ready to ſmile upon every free and impartial inquiry into Truth.

I hope none will think that I have been too free with that glorious and all perfect Being, before whom I bow with the greateſt reverence and ſubmiſſion, under an awful ſenſe of the vaſt and immenſe perfections of his nature.

On

On the other hand I ſolemnly profeſs, that nothing but a ſincere regard to Truth, and a deſire to rectify the miſtaken notions, which perſons have form'd to themſelves of Deity (which, I am very ſenſible, are a great diſſervice to the Intereſts of religion) could have engag'd me in an attempt of this nature.

And this, I am perſuaded, will be ſufficient to excuſe me in the ſight of Almighty God, if I ſhould chance to be in an error my ſelf; tho' it may not free me from the reflections of a cenſorious World.

The principle, which I ſhall lay down as the foundation of all my reaſonings, and which is indeed the foundation of all religion, is this.

That there is an eſſential and eternal difference of things, founded on the different relations which different things ſtand in to each other.

Hence ſome actions are morally, that is, in their own natures eternally good, and others morally evil; their goodneſs or their evil does not depend upon the arbitrary

bitrary appointment or injunction of any ſuperior Being, but upon the relation which one thing bears to another; for there is a natural fitneſs and congruity between ſome things, and a natural unfitneſs or diſproportion between others; this mutual agreement or diſagreement between things, is what we call their moral difference; having a ſtrict and juſt regard to the moral difference in our actions, ſo that we do not join together two things which are diſproportion'd, or do not agree, is what we call Moral Virtue.

This teacheth us what Virtue is, and whence our idea of it ariſes, *viz.* from the obſervation of ſymmetry and proportion in things which are the objects of our ſight, and transferring that idea to the objects of our underſtandings and wills.

Cicero hath ſet this in a very beautiful and eaſy light, in a paſſage which I ſhall quote from him.

Nec vero illa parva vis naturæ eſt, rationiſque, quod unum hoc animal ſentit, quid ſit ordo, quid ſit quod deceat in factis, dictiſque,

tiſque, qui modus. Itaque eorum ipſorum, quæ aſpectu ſentiuntur, nullum aliud animal, pulchritudinem, venuſtatem convenientiam partium ſentit. Quam ſimilitudinem natura, ratioque ab oculis ad animum transferens, multo etiam magis pulchritudinem, conſtantiam, ordinem in conſiliis, factiſque conſervandum putat, cavetque ne quid indecore, effœminative faciat, tum in omnibus & opinionibus, & factis, ne quid libidinoſe aut faciat aut cogitet. Quibus ex rebus conflatur & efficitur id, quod quærimus, honeſtum: quod etiamſi nobilitatum non ſit, tamen honeſtum ſit, quodque vere dicimus, etiamſi a nullo laudetur, laudabile eſſe natura.

Which is thus tranſlated, " It is ano-
" ther, and that no mean prerogative of
" our reaſonable nature, that man *alone*
" can diſcern all the beauties of order
" and decency, and knows how to go-
" vern his words and actions in confor-
" mity to them. It is he alone, that of
" all the creatures obſerves, and is pleas'd
" with the beauty, gracefulneſs, and ſym-
" metry

" metry of parts in the *objects of ſenſe*:
" Which nature and reaſon obſerving in
" them, from thence takes occaſion to ap-
" ply the ſame alſo *to thoſe of the mind*,
" and conclude, that beauty, conſiſtency
" and regularity, ſhould be much more
" kept up in our words and actions; and
" therefore commands that nothing be done
" that is effeminate or unbecoming, and
" that ſo ſtrict a guard be kept over every
" thought and action, as that no luſt or
" filthineſs be either conceiv'd or practis'd
" by us. From theſe inclinations and
" inſtincts of nature reſults, and is con-
" ſtituted that *honeſtum* we are ſeek-
" ing for: which however little valu'd
" and eſteem'd it may be, is nevertheleſs
" virtuous and amiable in it ſelf; and
" which we juſtly affirm, tho' it were
" commended by no one, to be yet in its
" own nature truly commendable."

It is very eaſy to obſerve, that there is a ſymmetry and proportion of parts in the natural world: Thoſe things which are the objects of our ſight, if their parts

are

are adapted and fitted to each other, at the very firſt view, give us the idea of pleaſure and delight, and theſe we preſently, without any heſitation, call beautiful and pretty. On the other hand, thoſe objects which are diſproportion'd, and between the parts whereof there is a manifeſt diſagreement and unfitneſs, naturally produce in our minds the idea of diſlike; and we at once pronounce them to be deform'd and ugly. The ſame obſervation is true with reſpect to ſounds, either as to their harmony or diſagreement.

Now it's evident that theſe are not founded on the caprice or humour of particular perſons, but that the whole world are agreed concerning it; for there is ſuch a thing as beauty and harmony *in nature*, whether any particular perſon can diſcover it or not.

The ſame harmony, beauty and proportion, as is obſervable in the natural world, is likewiſe to be diſcover'd in the moral; the idea of order and regularity, which we had from the objects of ſenſe,

is transferr'd to the objects of the mind; and a fitneſs and proportion between our thoughts, and actions, is as diſcoverable by reaſon, as harmony of ſounds is by the ear, or as beauty, and agreeable diſpoſition of parts is by the eye: and as the one exiſts by nature, and always continues the ſame, does not depend upon the humour of any; in like manner does the other; for as *Cicero* very finely expreſſes it, " This *honeſtum*, however little valu'd " and eſteem'd it may be, is nevertheleſs " amiable in it ſelf, and which, though " it were commended by no one, is yet " in its own nature truly commendable."

Having thus at large explain'd what I mean by the moral difference of actions and things, I now proceed to lay down another poſition, which is, that this moral difference of things, is the rule of action to every intelligent Being.

This is an acknowledg'd principle, and the truth of it confirm'd by the univerſal conſent of mankind; for the ſame individual action, as it ſtands related to different

rent circumſtances, may be either fit or unfit, good or bad; which can ariſe from nothing but the different relation which different things bear to each other.

Again, It's very evident that no Being can enter into any relation, whether it be that of a Creator, a Father, a Maſter, *&c.* but that there are ſome duties which naturally ariſe from the relation it ſelf, ſome things which are naturally fitted and ſuited to it (and ſo on the contrary) to the performance of which he is oblig'd by virtue of his relation, without any poſitive command or law from any Being to enforce his obedience, or his conformity to that which is fit for him to do in that ſtation in which he is fix'd.

Upon theſe accounts it appears very evident, that Morality is of a fix'd and unchangeable nature, and the obligation ariſing from hence is equally ſtrong with reſpect to the Deity, as mankind. *Virtue and Vice* are not meer ſounds, they have their foundation in the eternal and eſſential difference of things, and can poſſibly

receive no change from the will of a ſuperior: for there is an intrinſic beauty in the former, and an intrinſic turpitude and deformity in the latter, prior and antecedent to the will and command of the Deity, ſo that it is not in the power of *God himſelf* to deſtroy their eſſential difference, by making Virtue to be Vice, or Vice to be Virtue; for the nature of theſe is firm and immoveable, neither depends upon the caprice or opinions of men, nor upon the arbitrary conſtitution of God himſelf, but is the ſtandard by which all intelligent free agents ought to determine and regulate their actions. For as there is an immutable good in Virtue, and an immutable evil in Vice, the obligation we lie under, to practice the former and avoid the latter, is not founded upon any poſitive law or command, but in the native intrinſic goodneſs of the one, and in the malignity inſeparably attending the other.

This moral difference of things is that great and univerſal principle upon which the *whole order of reaſonable Beings* do act,

act, and the conduct of *all mankind* may be brought as an evidence of the truth of what I have aſſerted. For reaſon, as it is the glory and diſtinguiſhing perfection of the intellectual nature, is the profeſſed guide and rule of their actions; and there are none how far ſoever they appear to be ſunk beneath thc humane nature, but what have ſtill ſome regard to this: Now the office of reaſon is only to compare different things, as they ſtand in different relations to each other, and to paſs judgment concerning the fitneſs or unfitneſs, the decency or indecency of actions; hence it is that when any thing appears to us, juſt and fit to be done, we call it *reaſonable.*

It is therefore very evident, that this moral difference of things has the ſame foundation in nature as the reaſon of men, and has an abſolute and neceſſary connexion with it. And every one, that is acquainted with the make and temper of the humane mind, knows that this is the principle upon which it acts; for after a mature and

and deliberate ſearch into the nature of things, whether any act be agreeable or diſagreeable to *right reaſon*, a perſon either condems, or juſtifies himſelf.

Again, if we allow that there is no real and moral difference in things, antecedent to any command, or precepts of the Divine Being, and in conſequence of this, that God might have altered the preſent courſe and ſituation of things, have made Virtue Vice, and Vice Virtue, if he had pleaſed; yet according to the make of the reaſonable mind, notwithſtanding Vice would then have been recommended by a Divine Authority, and would have been enjoyned by a Divine Precept and Command; yet man would even then have entertain'd the ſame ſentiments of Vice that he has now, and Virtue would then have appeared as odious and deteſtable to his reaſon, as it does now amiable and agreeable, as odious and deteſtable to the eyes of his mind, as now the moſt deformed and frightful monſter does to his bodily eyes.

So

So that upon this abſur'd ſuppoſition, that we allow the Deity a power to alter and overturn the nature of things, yet if the faculties of our minds remain'd the ſame, a virtuous man muſt of neceſſity entertain hard thoughts of his God, deny him to be an infinitely wiſe and perfect Being, and would adhere to the ſteady practice of Virtue, notwithſtanding all his threats to the contrary.

Once more upon the ſuppoſition that Virtue and Vice are indifferent in the nature of things, or that they are perfectly arbitrary, and depend upon the will of God, ſo that he could have made Vice Virtue, and Virtue Vice according to his pleaſure; then its abſolutely impoſſible that God ſhould be that happy Being, which he is (for then there would be only this difference between him and the Devil, that the one is omnipotent, and the other not) except we allow that the Devil could be happy, with all thoſe vicious qualities attending him which now he has.

For if we take away the moral perfections of the Deity, the rectitude and ſpotleſs purity of his nature, and ſubſtitute in its ſtead malice, cruelty, tyranny and revenge; what is this, but the very image of an omnipotent Devil? and what regard ſuch a Being as this would meet with from man, is no difficulty to determine.

For the moral perfections of the Deity, his infinite wisdom and juſtice, his goodneſs, charity and benevolence, are the ground and foundation of that religious homage and worſhip which we pay him; his power abſtracted from theſe, tho' it may be the object of our fear and dread, can never be the object of our love and delight; and it would be impoſſible, according to the preſent diſpoſition of the humane mind, that man ſhould think favourably of him; and tho' he ſtood in dread of his power, yet his reaſon would teach him to hate and abhor him. Hence it appears that *Deity*, when repreſented in one light, is a great and good Being; but when conſider'd in the contrary character, he

he is a *cruel tyrant*; and as tyranny is never ſupported by equity and love, but always by force and power excluſive of it; it is very obſervable, that it always meets with a ſuitable return from thoſe, who are unhappily ſubject to this lawleſs power.

We have now reduc'd this matter into a very narrow compaſs, either to deny the truth of our faculties, or elſe to acknowledge a moral difference of things; and that this moral difference is a rule of action to us, or that it's our duty always to act what appears to us to be juſt, fit and good. We ſhall now proceed a ſtep farther, which is, that what appears to the reaſon of *all mankind*, to be juſt, fit and good, is *reaſonable* in the nature of things, and conſequently appears ſo to the reaſon of every intelligent Being, God himſelf not excepted; and therefore that the ſeveral orders of reaſonable Beings muſt determine by what appears to the reaſon of *all mankind*, to be juſt, fit and good.

This, I think, is obvious at the very firſt view; for as it was God who implanted in the mind of man, the diſcerning faculty, by which it *naturally* calls one thing good, and another evil; if God himſelf has not the ſame judgment of theſe things, it follows that he made creatures with facultes contradictory to his own, which reflects the higheſt diſhonour upon the wiſdom and goodneſs of our Creator: The ſame holds good with reſpect to all other reaſonable Beings; for if God may be ſaid to create two orders of rational creatures, the faculties of the one of which ſhall naturally judge contrary to the faculties of the other, it's certain God is the author of a contradiction; and as two contraries can never both be true, it's equally certain that God gave an order of Beings falſe faculties.

Again, unleſs this poſition be allow'd to be true, it's impoſſible that we ſhould form to our ſelves any notions of God, or have any idea of his attributes and perfections.

For

For as we are wholly unacquainted with that divine ſubſtance, in which theſe perfections reſide; all that we know of Almighty God, muſt be reſolv'd into the knowledge which we have of the properties of that ſubſtance; and if the divine wiſdom, juſtice or goodneſs, be of a different nature or kind (I do not mean of a different degree) from ours, then its abſolutely impoſſible in the nature of things, that we ſhould form any notion or idea of them: for if the moral difference of things be not that rule, in conformity to which the ſupreme Being acts, and if this does not appear the ſame to the *reaſon of the Deity*, as it does to the reaſon *of all mankind*, its impoſſible for us to judge concerning the juſtice or injuſtice of any of his actions; for if they have not their denomination of either good or bad, according to their agreement, or diſagreement with this eternal and unchangeable law, (which by the way is what we mean, when we ſay that God is *juſt* or *good*, if we apply any idea to the

terms) then all our reaſonings concerning the actions of the Deity are to no purpoſe; for if this be not the rule of his actions, nothing can be, but his own will and pleaſure; and if his actions receive their denomination of good or bad, according to their agreement or diſagreement with *this laſt rule*, then there is no room left for any diſpute concerning them, beeauſe he never does any thing but what he wills.

Again, if the moral perfections of the Deity are of a different nature or kind from ours, if his actions are not agreeable to the general rules of decency, juſtice and goodneſs, or if in his conduct he pays no regard to what appears to be juſt and right to the reaſon *of all mankind*, its impoſſible for us to imitate the perfection and purity of his nature, (in which all Divines have agreed to place the happineſs of the humane mind) becauſe it conſiſts in ſomewhat of which we have no notion or idea; nay, it would be a manifeſt abſurdity and contradiction, (ſuppoſing

ſing it were poſſible) for man who is a rational Being to imitate God, becauſe upon the former ſuppoſition, the divine actions as they are diſagreeable to the reaſon of mankind (and if they are not, the rule of their actions is the ſame) they are contrary to that principle which is, and ought to be, the ſtandard of all humane actions.

Once more, if God does not determine to act agreeably to what the whole intelligent world does naturally call juſt, fit and good, it's impoſſible for man to paſs any judgment concerning his actions; whereas it muſt be confeſs'd, that God has often appeal'd in Scripture to the common ſenſe and reaſon of mankind, concerning the equality, the juſtice or injuſtice of his actions.

Upon the whole, we are brought to this difficulty, either to allow, which was what I at firſt aſſerted, that the rule of action to the divine Being himſelf is the moral difference of things, and that this appears the ſame to the reaſon of God,

as

as it does to the reaſon of man, or elſe that we can have no notion of the moral perfections of the Deity, and conſequently can neither reaſon concerning them, nor imitate them, in which, as I hinted above, the happineſs of man does conſiſt. Again, either we muſt be forc'd to confeſs, that the ſolemn appeals which in many places of the holy writings are made to the reaſon of men, concerning the juſtice and equality of God's proceedings with ſinners, are abſurd, trifling and inſignificant, which is the higheſt affront to the wiſdom of God: or elſe on the other hand, we muſt acknowledge, that we muſt judge concerning the *equality* of God's *ways*, according to the common notions we have of what is juſt and right, and theſe of neceſſity muſt be the ſame, (I mean they cannot differ in nature from thoſe in the mind of the Deity) becauſe truth being ſimple and uniform, if theſe notions are juſt and true in us, which of neceſſity they muſt be, in order to qualify us to paſs judgment concerning the

the juſtice or goodneſs of God, they muſt then obtain (though in an infinitely higher degree, yet not in a different relation of perfection) with reſpect to God himſelf.

To this I beg leave to add this farther remark, that if Virtue and Vice are indifferent in their own nature, and the Deity may break through all the laws of decency, juſtice and right, without any loſs or diminution to his happineſs, it is very unkind and cruel in God to inſiſt upon the practice of Virtue as the only terms of our happineſs, and forbid us the practice of Vice upon pain of eternal damnation, when if God himſelf could be happy, there is no natural reaſon to be aſſign'd why man could not have been happy, whether his conduct had been virtuous or vicious, and upon this account, it would have been more agreeable to our notions of infinite goodneſs, if God had left men at their liberty, to chuſe either Virtue or Vice, and allow'd them to have annex'd their happineſs to either.

To

To cloſe my reaſonings upon this head, What an amiable and lovely repreſentation is this of the Deity! It appears beautiful to our reaſon at the firſt view, and the more we examine into it, the more we diſcover its beauty and juſtice. This is in truth divinity; a *divinity* which deſerves to be ador'd and admir'd by the whole order of reaſonable Beings.

Hence we learn to form to our ſelves the idea of a Being who always acts agreeably to the eternal and unchangeable laws of juſtice and goodneſs. Hence we learn to form to our ſelves the idea of a Being poſſeſs'd of all infinite moral perfections, whoſe *diſtinguiſhing* character it is, that all his actions are juſt and good, who never deviates from the great rule of right, but whoſe will is conſtantly determin'd by the fix'd and unalterable nature of things.

But to give the greater beauty to this repreſentation of a Deity, let us ſet a different one in contraſt and oppoſition to it; and then our idea of God, is of a Being, who, becauſe he is omnipotent and

ſu-

ſupreme, and conſequently independent and accountable to none, may overturn the nature and order of things at pleaſure, may act what is unjuſt, unfit and unworthy of a reaſonable Being; may be cruel, malicious and revengeful; may bring creatures into Being, render them miſerable and unhappy to eternity: and in fine, who, becauſe he has all things at his diſpoſe, may act as he pleaſes without any regard to juſtice and decency.

What a gloomy and melancholy idea is this! and what a monſtrous and terrible Being! And yet it's ſuch a Being as this, which many chriſtians call their God; from whence it appears no difficulty to account for their religion, which conſiſts in nothing but a ſlaviſh fear and dread of his almighty power; who only deſire to appeaſe his wrath; and if they think themſelves ſo far in his favour, as that he will inflict no poſitive puniſhment upon them, they have nothing more to do with religion, nor are at all deſirous to imitate the purity and perfection of his nature.

It is eaſy to aſſign the reaſon of their miſtake in this particular, which is, that having been always accuſtom'd to conſider ſovereignty or almighty power, as the prime and eſſential perfection of the divine nature (which by the way ought by no means to be allow'd) they can admit nothing as truth which ſeems to limit or reſtrain it, and therefore rather than deny the ſupreme Being a power to do every thing; they will allow him a liberty to act what is unjuſt, and unfit for him to do: and ſome have been ſo fond for this attribute and perfection of Deity, as to affirm, that impoſſibilities and contradictions are the objects of divine power.

What ſhadow of imperfection or defect of power is it, that God never chuſes to act any thing but what is really juſt and good? true; as he is omnipotent he always does what he wills, but then he ever wills what is fit and right to be done.

Again, we do not deny the ſupreme Being a natural power to do what is really unfit or unjuſt, but we affirm, that the

the exercise of this natural power is wholly inconsistent with the eternal rectitude and purity of his nature, and a direct contradiction to his infinite wisdom, justice and goodness, and in consequence of this destructive of his very essence; for the moral perfections of the divine nature are as necessary to constitute that Being, the idea of which we express by the term *God*, as his very existence is necessary to make him to be; that is, he can no more be said to be *God*, without *moral perfections*, than he can be said *to be* without *having an existence*.

None hath set this matter in a stronger and clearer light, than that great reasoning Divine, Dr. *Scot*. "To suppose, "says he, that the will and power of "God are not perfectly subject to his "moral perfections, is to suppose him a "very *defective* and *imperfect* Being, a "*lawless* will and power, being the "greatest *defect* in nature. Wherefore "to secure our minds against all *injurious* "apprehensions of God, this is a most "necessary rule, that we conceive him

" to be ſuch a Being as can neither *will*
" nor *act* any thing but what his own eſſen-
" tial *wiſdom*, *goodneſs* and *juſtice* do ap-
" prove; that in all his *decrees*, *purpoſes*,
" *choices* and *actions*, conſults his *moral*
" *perfections*, and perfectly regulates him-
" ſelf by them, and doth neither *chuſe*
" nor *refuſe*, *elect* nor *reprobate*, *ſave* nor
" *damn*, without their full conſent and
" approbation: for to affirm that he is
" not oblig'd to regulate himſelf, by wiſ-
" dom, juſtice and goodneſs, or that he
" can do otherwiſe, is to attribute to him
" a power to will and act *fooliſhly*, *mali-*
" *ciouſly* and *unjuſtly*, which indeed is
" not ſo properly *power* as *impotence*;
" to attribute ſuch a liberty to God, is to
" *ſcandalize* his nature, and *reproach* it
" with *imperfection*; for all that *power*
" which is not conducted by *juſtice* and
" *goodneſs* is only power to do *miſchief*,
" to *tyrannize* over other Beings, and to
" ſport and play with their miſeries:
" which is ſo far from being a *perfection*
" of power, that it proceeds from the
" moſt wretched *weakneſs* and *impotence*."

Once

Once more if the moral difference of things be not the conſtant rule of action to the Divine Being, but if at any time he exerciſes his *natural* power in doing what is unfit and unjuſt, the neceſſary conſequences of ſuch a conduct will be *uneaſineſs*, *miſery* and *pain*. And this leads me to the latter part of my Eſſay; which is, the natural and neceſſary connection the practice of Virtue has with the happineſs of all reaſonable Beings.

For as the happineſs of every Being conſiſts in its perfection, and as the perfection of a reaſonable mind conſiſts in its acting agreeably to the moſt perfect reaſon, (which is what we mean by Virtue) then every deviation from the unchangeable rule of right, as it is an argument of imperfection in that Being, renders it proportionably miſerable: and as every reaſonable ſoul has a power to reflect upon its actions, to examine and compare their agreement or diſagreement with what is juſt and fit in the nature of things, every ſuch reflex act of the mind, upon

" any

any irregular or unworthy conduct, muſt be attended with a vaſt uneaſineſs.

Heaven and *Hell* in the opinion of our beſt Divines, are not ſo much a *place* as a *ſtate*; they may in a very proper ſenſe be ſaid to be begun in this life, tho' they ſhall have their final completion in the next. They are not only the *reward* and the *puniſhment*, but the *natural* and *neceſſary reſult* of a *virtuous* and *vicious* conduct, and are as much the *effects* of thoſe *cauſes*, as any effect produc'd by any cauſe whatſoever.

Virtue is the *health* and *ſtrength* of the ſoul, a *food* which is in a very peculiar manner fitted for its *nouriſhment*, and *agrees* with its *conſtitution*. But *Vice* is its *bane* and *deſtruction*, a cruel *diſeaſe* which *waſts* and *conſumes* it, or a deadly *poiſon* which *tears* and *divides* the fine *texture* and *compoſition* of its *parts*.

If any ask, whence is this natural and neceſſary connexion between *Virtue* and *Happineſs*, *Vice* and *Miſery*: It may ſuffice to ſay that it is founded in the nature of

of things, and the experience of every reaſonable Being is a ſufficient evidence of the truth of it.

And it may with the ſame reaſon be ask'd whence it is, that the mind is naturally pleaſed and delighted, when the eye beholds a beautiful object, or a pleaſant proſpect.

Or whence it is, that the ſoul tho' it has been ruffled and diſcompoſed, is naturally raviſh'd and delighted, render'd, placid, calm and ſerene, by an agreeable conſort of muſick.

For *Virtue* in like manner is ſo *related* to the *faculties* of a *rational ſoul*, as that the practice of it *naturally* fills the *mind* with *pleaſure*, *eaſe* and *ſatisfaction*.

And a virtuous perſon (tho' he cannot be compleatly happy in this life, becauſe of the imperfections attending his body and mind) yet may enjoy himſelf, and a divine peace and ſerenity, in whatſoever ſtate he may be fix'd, and can reflect upon his conduct with pleaſure and ſatisfaction. The contrary, is true with

with reſpect to Vice and a vicious perſon.

But to carry this matter yet farther; as God himſelf is a reaſonable Being, and in conſequence of this, as the rule of all his actions, is what appears to right reaſon to be juſt and good, and as this is the perfection of his nature, and conſequently his happineſs; if he deviates from this rule, the conſequence of ſuch a conduct will be pain and uneaſineſs, for this will render him obnoxious to his own reaſon; And tho' he be independent and accountable to no ſuperior Being, yet his own almighty power cannot ſecure him from the uneaſy reflections of his own mind; and that principle which engages him to puniſh and abhor Vice in another, would teach him to loath and abhor himſelf.

I cannot do greater juſtice to the preſent argument, than by quoting the ſame Divine upon this head, whom I mentioned above.

That, ſays he, " Which renders God " ſo infinitely happy in himſelf, is not

" ſo

" ſo much the Almighty power, he hath
" to defend himſelf from foreign hurts
" and injuries, as the exact agreement of
" all his motions and actions, with the all
" comprehending reaſon of his own mind.
" Whereas, if upon an impoſſible ſuppo-
" ſition it were otherwiſe, there would a-
" riſe a *civil war* within his own boſom,
" againſt which *omnipotence* it ſelf could
" not *protect* or *defend* him. For in deſ-
" pight of himſelf he would be continu-
" ally expoſed to the juſt *reproaches* of
" his own mind, and his own all-ſeeing
" eye would every moment *detect*, *libel*
" and *upbraid* him, and render him a
" moſt *inglorious* ſpectacle to himſelf: ſo
" that he would be ſo far from being in-
" finitely *pleaſed* and *ſatisfied* with him-
" ſelf, that his own infallible reaſon
" would be an everlaſting *vexation* to him.

It is eaſy to ſuppoſe, from the obſerva-tion of the uneaſineſs attending a virtu-ous perſon, when he has acted unworthy of himſelf, that the Divine Being would with ſeverity animadvert upon his own

conduct, if he ſhould ever do any thing diſagreeable to the ſtricteſt rules of juſtice and goodneſs; for as he was poſſeſs'd of infinite wiſdom, he knew what was moſt fit for him to do, and having infinite power, he could be under no temptation, neither from the fear of evil, nor the hope of good (which may in ſome meaſure extenuate the crime in one of his creatures) to do any thing unfit or unjuſt; and therefore when he broke thro' the rules of decency, juſtice and truth, he muſt be ſenſible that he acted againſt the dictates of his own all-knowing mind; which *vicious* conduct muſt be condemn'd by himſelf, and his animadverſions upon it will be more ſevere than thoſe of men, in proportion, as his knowledge and power to do otherwiſe were greater than theirs.

Beſides, upon the abſurd ſuppoſition, that God ſhould act thus; if man continued to be the Being which he now is, with the ſame intellectual faculties and powers, he muſt condemn this conduct in his Creator, and abhor and contemn him

him for it, and this would be his puniſhment: for the mean opinion which every rank and order of reaſonable Beings would entertain of him, (of which by his omniſcience he would be ſufficiently appriz'd) would neceſſarily be attended with an inward torment and vexation of mind.

I thought neceſſary to ſay thus much, in order to ſet the argument in a clear light; but becauſe it is of more importance, than it appears to be at firſt view, I ſhall briefly repreſent ſome of the advantages which ariſe from theſe reflections, and conclude.

In the firſt place it ſufficiently convinces us of the falſeneſs of ſeveral religious principles which have long diſturb'd the peace of good honeſt chriſtians, ſuch as the doctrines of original ſin in the commonly received ſenſe, and an abſolute unconditional election, and reprobation, *&c.*

Again, it animates and encourages that *ambition* which is natural to man, a principle which was planted in the humane mind by the wiſe Author of our natures,

to ſubſerve the beſt purpoſes; but has been groſly miſrepreſented, and abuſed by the generality of the world. For a reaſonable ſoul, when conſider'd in a juſt and proper light, is not that *mean* and *deſpicable* Being it is often repreſented: no, the *humane* nature is nearly ally'd to the *divine*; our knowledge, ſo far as it reaches, is equal in perfection to God's; and the ſame general rules of decency, juſtice and goodneſs, determine his and our wills; and by our repeated acts of Virtue, we are continually making nearer and nearer advances to that all perfect and glorious Being, who is the head of all things, and the glory of the intellectual world: and what greater encouragement can we have to continue ſtedfaſt in the practice of Virtue?

This teacheth us alſo, to rectify our miſtaken notions, and miſapprehenſions of the Deity, and not conceive of him, as a Being whoſe actions are lawleſs and irregular, and who, becauſe of his ſove-

reignty,

reignty, may diſpenſe with the eternal rules of juſtice and truth. Such a deſcription of God, as this, reflects a greater diſhononour upon him, than the denyal of his exiſtence.

Again, we learn from the reflections already mention'd, to form to our ſelves juſt ideas and rational hopes of a future happineſs: for as the happineſs of man conſiſts in his perfection, and as his perfection conſiſts in his Virtue; ſo long as we continue under the influence of virtuous principles, we need be in no anxiety or fear concerning our happineſs. As then our happineſs and miſery depends upon our Virtue or Vice, if we are able to paſs a judgment concerning our actions, we may arrive at certainty concerning our future eſtate. It muſt be confeſs'd that a ſuperior Being may inflict a poſitive puniſhment upon a virtuous perſon, but then it's evident ſuch a conduct is inconſiſtent with real goodneſs; and upon this account we need not be in fear or dread of the Divine Being, ſo long as we are virtuous, and he is good.

Once

Once more, we learn hence the peculiar excellency and perfection of the chriſtian religion, which recommends nothing to its profeſſors, but what is agreeable to the ſtricteſt rules of juſtice and truth: the miracles which were wrought to confirm it are not a greater evidence of its divinity, than the morality of thoſe precepts which it enjoins; which are equally binding and obligatory upon every rational Being, whether they were deliver'd by perſons divinely inſpir'd or not; for theſe receiv'd no additional force or authority, by being deliver'd by Jeſus and his Apoſtles.

The chriſtian religion is a noble ſyſtem of pure and holy laws, which though they might have been diſcover'd by reaſon, yet are a great help to us, by being thus plainly revealed; ſo that at one view we diſcover our duty, which we could not have found out, but by a laborious ſearch and enquiry.

It has given us a very plain and eaſy repreſentation of what is moſt perfective of the reaſonable nature, and ſet it in a very

very beautiful light; but has not (in my opinion) added to the number of moral duties, or enjoin'd any thing, as abſolutely neceſſary to be done, which was not our duty antecedent to this revelation, and which is not perfectly agreeable to the rules of juſtice and truth.

Thus, Sir, have I endeavour'd to ſet the argument in a clear light. I choſe to addreſs my thoughts upon this head, in a letter to your ſelf, that I might have an opportunity of expreſſing my gratitude for the benefit, which I, amongſt many others, have receiv'd from your free and ingenious labours, and of ſubſcribing my ſelf,

Reverend *SIR*,

Your oblig'd

Humble Servant, &c.

LONDON, March 15.
1722-3.

FINIS.

Juſt Publiſhed.

I. A Defenſe of the Negative of the two Queſtions, propos'd by Mr. *Reynolds* to Mr. *Read*; containing a ſhort Account of the Doctrine of the Trinity, the Worſhip due to Jeſus Chriſt, and the nature of involuntary Error.

II. The *Scriptures* and the *Athanaſians* compar'd, in their accounts of God the Father, and of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

Both Printed for *S. Billingſley* at the *Judges-head* in *Chancery-Lane*; and Sold by *J. Roberts* in *Warwick Lane*; *A. Dodd* without *Temple-Barr*; and *J. Billingſley* under the *Royal-Exchange*.

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